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INFO ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE  
AMCONSUL DHAHRAN

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RIYADH 002406

LONDON FOR TUELLER; PARIS FOR ALLEGRONE

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SUBJECT: CROWN PRINCE ABDULLAH THE DIPLOMAT

1. (U) CLASSIFIED BY CDA THEODORE KATTOUF, REASON 1.5.D.

2. (C) SUMMARY: GIVEN KING FAHD'S UNCERTAIN HEALTH, CROWN PRINCE ABDULLAH APPEARS TO HAVE MOVED INTO THE ROLE OF REPRESENTING SAUDI ARABIA'S FACE TO THE OUTSIDE WORLD. WHILE DRAMATIC CHANGES ARE NOT THE HALLMARK OF SAUDI GOVERNANCE, ABDULLAH WILL NO DOUBT PUT HIS OWN IMPRIMATUR ON SAUDI DIPLOMACY. HE IS, FOR EXAMPLE, ATTUNED TO LOCAL POLITICS AND WILL VIEW SAG'S OVERSEAS COMMITMENTS FROM THE OPTIC OF THE EFFECT THEY WILL HAVE ON DOMESTIC PRIORITIES. ALTHOUGH THE CROWN PRINCE HAS REPEATEDLY STRESSED HIS COMMITMENT TO CLOSE BILATERAL TIES WITH THE U.S., HE HAS SPOKEN FORCEFULLY OF THE NEED FOR A JUST PEACE FOR THE PALESTINIANS AND SYRIANS. WE EXPECT ABDULLAH TO BE ACTIVE IN SHAPING AN ARAB CONSENSUS THAT KEEPS THE PEACE PROCESS ALIVE, WHILE MAINTAINING THE APPEARANCE OF ARAB UNITY AND RESOLVE. END SUMMARY.

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ABDULLAH'S DIPLOMATIC PROFILE  
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3. (C) CROWN PRINCE ABDULLAH BIN ABD AL-AZIZ, LED THE SAUDI DELEGATION TO THE JUNE 7-8 TRIPARTITE SUMMIT IN DAMASCUS. ABDULLAH WILL REPRESENT SAUDI ARABIA AT THE JUNE 22 SUMMIT IN CAIRO AND PERHAPS ALL FUTURE ARAB SUMMITRY.

4. (C) ALTHOUGH IT IS CLEAR THAT HE STILL MUST BE CONSULTED ON KEY DECISIONS, PARTICULARLY ON FOREIGN POLICY MATTERS, KING FAHD'S INVOLVEMENT IN DAY-TO-DAY AFFAIRS OF STATE REMAINS SPORADIC. RECENTLY, THE KING RECEIVED SULTAN QABUS, AND THE KUWAITI AND BAHRAINI FOREIGN MINISTERS IN JEDDAH. HE ALSO MET IN MECCA THE HEADS OF STATE AND GOVERNMENTS LEADING THEIR HAJJ DELEGATIONS. EVEN EARLIER IN THE YEAR, HE HAD A SHORT MEETING WITH FORMER PRESIDENT BUSH. THE MEDIA REPORT THE KING PRESIDING OVER MEETINGS OF THE COUNCIL OF MINISTERS THAT ISSUE STATEMENTS SPELLING OUT THE SAG'S POSITION ON FOREIGN POLICY ISSUES. NEVERTHELESS, ALL AVAILABLE EVIDENCE INDICATES THAT THESE ENCOUNTERS ARE TIGHTLY CONTROLLED AFFAIRS AND LARGELY PROTOCOLARY IN CHARACTER.

5. (C) WHILE EFFORTS PERSIST TO FUDGE THE ISSUE OF THE KING'S PRESENCE AT THE HELM OF STATE, THE CURRENT RUSH OF ARAB AND PEACE PROCESS POLITICS IS INCREASINGLY FORCING THE AL SAUD TO PERMIT THE HEIR APPARENT TO PROJECT THEIR TOP LEADERSHIP. INDEED, ABDULLAH HAS STEPPED IN WHERE A SUBSTANTIVE OFFICIAL SAUDI PRESENCE IS REQUIRED. THUS, THE CROWN PRINCE ATTENDED THE GCC SUMMIT IN MUSCAT LAST DECEMBER AND THE RECENT DAMASCUS TRIPARTITE SUMMIT. ON THE OTHER HAND, FOREIGN MINISTER PRINCE SAUD AL-FAYSAL REPRESENTED THE SAG AT AN EARLIER SYRIA-EGYPT-SAUDI ARABIA SUMMIT IN EGYPT, ALSO IN DECEMBER, AND AT THE SHARM AL-SHAYKH ANTI-TERRORISM SUMMIT (ILLUSTRATING THE KING'S CONTINUED POLICY ENGAGEMENT, FAHD REPORTEDLY OVERRULED ABDULLAH AND SULTAN'S RELUCTANCE TO ATTEND THE SUMMIT, INSISTING THAT THE SAG BE REPRESENTED).

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¶6. (C) AT HOME, ABDULLAH IS NOW MEETING VIRTUALLY ALL HIGH-LEVEL FOREIGN VISITORS TO SAUDI ARABIA (USUALLY ONE A DAY AND OFTEN SEVERAL MORE) AND IS CONDUCTING WIDELY-PUBLICIZED AND QUITE INTENSE TELEPHONE DIPLOMACY WITH ARAB AND OTHER FOREIGN LEADERS. BY CONTRAST, MINDEF SULTAN - LONG CONSIDERED BY FOREIGN PUNDITS AS A RIVAL TO ABDULLAH WHO WOULD INTRUDE ON THE CROWN PRINCE'S SPACE - IS MUCH LESS VISIBLE AND CLEARLY SECONDARY IN THESE FOREIGN CONTACTS. ALL THIS HAS CERTAINLY HELPED BURNISH THE CROWN PRINCE'S DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL CREDENTIALS AND HELPED RAISE HIS RATHER LOW PROFILE IN THE DIPLOMATIC ARENA STEMMING FROM FAHD'S PREVIOUSLY JEALOUS OVERSIGHT OF FOREIGN POLICY, NOT TO MENTION THE CROWN PRINCE'S RETICENCE STEMMING FROM A SPEECH IMPEDIMENT.

¶7. (C) ABDULLAH'S ACTIVISM ON THE INTERNATIONAL STAGE PERMITS HIM TO PROJECT HIMSELF AS A DE FACTO HEAD OF STATE -- A ROLE IN WHICH HE APPEARS TO BE INCREASINGLY COMFORTABLE. ABDULLAH WAS AN ACTIVE PARTICIPANT IN DAMASCUS AND, BY SAUDI ACCOUNT, WAS INSTRUMENTAL IN ENSURING THAT IRAQ NOT BE INVITED TO THE CAIRO SUMMIT. OTHER MEETINGS, SUCH AS THE CAIRO SUMMIT, WILL LIKELY FURTHER BOOST THE CROWN PRINCE'S STATURE. IN SHORT, DOMESTICALLY, THE SAUDIS ARE GETTING USED TO SEEING ABDULLAH IN CHARGE. ARAB LEADERS ARE LEARNING TO DO THE SAME.

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THE INNER CIRCLE: CONFLICTING ADVICE AND FRUSTRATION

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¶8. (C) AS ABDULLAH BURNISHES HIS CREDENTIALS HERE AND ABROAD, WE ARE TOLD THERE IS RISING IMPATIENCE WITHIN HIS INNER CIRCLE THAT THE CROWN PRINCE ASSERT HIMSELF MORE WITH REGARD TO THE KING; THAT IS, THAT ABDULLAH TAKE A MORE VOCAL POSITION ON KEY ISSUES WHICH ARE BEFORE THE SENIOR LEADERSHIP. THIS VIEW, REPORTEDLY HELD BY YOUNGER MEMBERS OF ABDULLAH'S FAMILY, HAS BEEN COUNTERED BY THE APPROACH OF SENIOR ADVISORS -- PRINCIPALLY SHAYKH ABD AL-AZIZ AL-TUWAYJRI -- WHO COUNSEL PATIENCE AND RESTRAINT. TO DATE ABDULLAH HAS EMBRACED THE LATTER VIEW, PERHAPS COGNIZANT THAT LITTLE WOULD BE GAINED, AND MUCH COULD BE LOST, BY PUSHING THE LIMITS OF EXISTING LINES OF AUTHORITY AND RESPONSIBILITY WITH A KING WHO HAS NEVER BEEN RETICENT TO EXERCISE POWER, AND WHO COULD THEORETICALLY, AT LEAST, REMOVE ABDULLAH AS HEIR APPARENT.

¶9. (C) THE SHIFTING LINES OF AUTHORITY, AND UNCERTAINTY OVER WHETHER AND WHEN THE KING WILL WEIGH IN ON MATTERS, HAS GENERATED FRUSTRATION AMONG THE CROWN PRINCE'S CLOSEST SUPPORTERS. A FORMER U.S. MILITARY ADVISOR TO THE SANG AND CLOSE FRIEND OF SHAYKH TUWAYJRI FOR OVER TWENTY YEARS DESCRIBES TUWAYJRI AS "DEPRESSED" OVER THE CURRENT STATE OF AFFAIRS WITHIN THE HIGHEST COUNCILS OF THE RULING FAMILY. TUWAYJRI REPORTEDLY HAS HAD TO SUFFER BROADSIDES FROM YOUNGER ABDULLAH FAMILY MEMBERS WHO CHARGE THAT TUWAYJRI IS OLD, OUT OF TOUCH, AND NO LONGER DISPENSES SOUND ADVICE TO THE CROWN PRINCE. TUWAYJRI'S VISIBLE PRESENCE AT THE TRIPARTITE SUMMIT IN DAMASCUS, AND HIS RECENT REGIONAL TRAVELS ON BEHALF OF ABDULLAH, TO SYRIA AND MOROCCO, HOWEVER, REAFFIRM THAT ABDULLAH HAS NOT ABANDONED HIS LONG-STANDING CONFIDANTE. INDEED, TUWAYJRI WILL ACCOMPANY HIM TO CAIRO ON JUNE 21.

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IMPLICATIONS FOR THE U.S.

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¶10. (C) WHILE ABDULLAH WILL QUIETLY BEGIN TO PUT HIS OWN IMPRIMATUR ON SAUDI DIPLOMACY, WE WILL ALSO BE WATCHING TO SEE IF AND HOW THE CONVENTIONAL THINKING ON ABDULLAH -- MORE ATTUNED TO SYRIAN AND ARAB CONCERNS --

IS TRANSLATED INTO ANY SPECIFIC AGENDA. IN ADDITION TO ARAB AND BROADER MUSLIM INTERESTS, AS WE HAVE REPORTED BEFORE (RIYADH 29), ABDULLAH IS ATTUNED TO THE DOMESTIC POLITICS OF SAUDI ARABIA, ITS SECURITY REQUIREMENTS, AND THE AFFECT THAT THE SAG'S OVERSEAS COMMITMENTS WILL HAVE ON DOMESTIC PRIORITIES OR ON THE VERY CONSERVATIVE SAUDI POPULACE. THAT SAID, CHANGE IS NOT A HALLMARK OF SAUDI GOVERNANCE AND ABDULLAH, WHO HAS BEEN FAITHFULLY DEFERENTIAL TO FAHD, HAS GIVEN NO INDICATION THAT HE IS SEEKING ANY DRAMATIC REVERSAL OF CURRENT POLICIES.

¶11. (C) THE CROWN PRINCE HAS REPEATEDLY AND EMPHATICALLY STRESSED HIS PERSONAL COMMITMENT TO A STRONG U.S.-SAUDI BILATERAL RELATIONSHIP AND APPEARS ANXIOUS TO DEMONSTRATE THAT HE WILL KEEP U.S. POLICY INTERESTS FIRMLY IN VIEW. WE EXPECT THIS TO CONTINUE. AT THE SAME TIME, ABDULLAH HAS SPOKEN FORCEFULLY ABOUT ARAB RIGHTS AND FEAR THAT A STALEMATE IN THE PEACE PROCESS WILL ONLY SPAWN THE POPULARITY OF EXTREMISTS. HE BELIEVES THAT IT PROFITS THE AL SAUD AND THE U.S. LITTLE, IF BY ACCEDING TO U.S. WISHES, THE RULING FAMILY ALIENATES KEY DOMESTIC CONSTITUENCIES. UNDER ABDULLAH'S INCREASING INFLUENCE, WE EXPECT THE SAG TO ADHERE CLOSELY TO THE ARAB CONSENSUS, INCLUDING: ESTABLISHMENT OF A JUST AND LASTING PEACE BASED ON THE PRINCIPLE OF LAND FOR PEACE. ABDULLAH HAS REPEATEDLY STRESSED HIS PERSONAL BOTTOM LINE FOR THE PEACE PROCESS -- INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENT ON THE STATUS OF JERUSALEM.

¶12. (C) OF SPECIAL INTEREST TO THE U.S. IS WHETHER ABDULLAH WILL SEEK TO PLAY A MORE FORCEFUL AND ACTIVIST ROLE IN ARAB COUNCILS THAN HAS TRADITIONALLY BEEN THE CASE FOR THE SAG. ABDULLAH'S LONGSTANDING TIES TO ASAD MAY GIVE HIM A SPECIAL INFUENCE WITH THE SYRIANS, BUT THE REVERSE IS MORE LIKELY TO PROVE TRUE. HIS FORCEFUL LINE ON IRAQI PARTICIPATION AT THE CAIRO SUMMIT IS PERHAPS A HARBINGER OF GREATER EFFORTS TO SHAPE ARAB POSITIONS RATHER THAN REACT TO THEM.

¶13. (C) SEE RIYADH 29 (NOTAL) FOR MORE BIOGRAPHIC INFORMATION ON CROWN PRINCE ABDULLAH.

KATTOUF